

Precision Self-care for Nurses



The Elements of Care®
Program for
BEATING BURNOUT

Martha M. Libster *PhD, APRN*

Content Copyright© 2022 Golden Apple Publications

Cover Copyright© 2022 Golden Apple Publications

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, Web distribution, information storage and retrieval systems or otherwise, without the prior written consent of the Publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

Cover/Book Design and Artwork: Mark Gelotte www.markgelotte.com

Copy Edit: Julie Smith Taylor

Printed in the United States

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022937749

Includes bibliographical references and Index ISBN 979-8-9860801-1-6

Libster, Martha Mathews 1960-

1. Nursing 2. Stress management 3. Self - Help - Personal Growth, 4. Herbalism/Herbalist
5. Body Mind & Spirit Hermeticism.

I. Libster, Martha Mathews author

Golden Apple Healing Arts does not warrant or guarantee any of the products, recipes, or remedies described or discussed on its website, or in a seminar, webinar, or publication; nor has it performed any independent analysis in connection with any of the information shared in good faith with attendees, readers, and guests. Golden Apple Healing Arts does not assume, and expressly disclaims, any obligation to obtain and include information other than that which it deems important. The attendee, reader, or guest is expressly warned to consider and adopt all safety precautions that might be indicated by the activities described herein and to avoid all potential hazards. By following any educational instructions contained herein, the attendee, reader, or guest willingly assumes all benefits and risks in connection with such education.

Golden Apple Healing Arts makes no representations or warranties of any kind, including but not limited to, the warranties of fitness for particular purpose or merchantability, nor are any such representations implied with respect to the material set forth herein, and Golden Apple Healing Arts takes no responsibility with respect to such material. Golden Apple Healing Arts and its subsidiaries shall not be liable for any special, consequential, or exemplary damages resulting, in whole or part, from the attendee, reader, or guest's use of, or reliance upon, this educational material.

Information presented by Golden Apple Healing Arts and Golden Apple Publications is not intended to be a substitute for the services of a health care professional nor is it meant to authorize or endorse the use of herbs or other therapeutic modalities by the professional reader in the care of patients. Neither Dr. Martha Libster nor Golden Apple Healing Arts are responsible for any consequences incurred by those employing remedies. Botanical and other therapeutic knowledge is constantly changing. Different opinions by experts, continued research and clinical results, individual circumstances, and possible error in preparing educational content requires the attendee, reader, and guest to use their own judgment and other information when making decisions based on the material contained in or derived from Golden Apple Healing Arts resources and publications. Although Dr. Martha, contributor(s), and Golden Apple Healing Arts have, as is humanly possible, taken care to ensure that the information is accurate and up to date at the time of inclusion on this web site and in events and services, people are strongly advised to confirm that the information meets their unique needs and health patterns and complies with the latest legislation and health care standards where they reside in the world. Dr. Martha Libster and Golden Apple Healing Arts cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for an attendee's, reader's, or guest's use of botanicals or any other therapeutic modality discussed during an educational service or event in the care of themselves or others.

Om wagi shori mum!

This mantra is homage to Manjushri, a Master of Speech in Buddhist tradition, who is the patron of writers in the arts and sciences.

Manjushri means "Gentle Glory."

May each word and the essence of the message written herein be infused with the gentle presence of Manjushri's discriminating wisdom and may each reader access the power, wisdom, and love of their own heart that enables them to choose their medicines wisely no matter how gentle that medicine may seem to be.

Table of Contents

Forward by Catherine Dees

Preface by Martha Mathews Libster

Chapter 1 Welcome Back to the Plant World	1
Memories and Plant Partnership	3
Gentle Medicine Self-Study #1 Plant Memories	3
Plant Teachers	5
Gentle Medicine Self-Study #2 When does food become medicine?	6
Self-care in a Tiered Healthcare System	9
Gentle Medicine Self-Study #3 Self-care Survey Question	11
Chapter 2 The Elements of Care® Program: A Guide for Self-Care	13
Tea Tasting	14
Gentle Medicine Self-Study #4 Managing Expectations with Mindful Tea Tasting ..	16
Sentience and Common Sense	17
Lesson from St. John's Wort	21
Self-care with a Capital S	24
Season for Climate Change	26
Gentle Medicine Self-Study #5 Comfort Level with Change	27
Gentle Medicine Self-Study #6 Change and Transition	28
Gentle Medicine Self-Study #7The Power of Perception	29
Five Elements of Climate Creation	32
Chapter 3 The 5 P's of the Self-care Model	35
The Self-care Model for Primary Prevention	35
The Solution is Simple	38
Gentle Medicine Self-Study #8 A Simple Lemon Compress for Fever Reduction	38
Plants	40
Plant Designs and Growth Patterns	40
Plant Parts	41
Plant Constituents	45
Common Constituents of Plants	46
Peace and Plant-like Gentleness	49
Peaceful Safe Place	53
Gentle Medicine Self-Study # 9 Designing a Peaceful Safe Place	55
Patterns in Health, Physics, and Paradigms	56
Putting Energetic Patterns First	57
Eight Principle Patterns	60
Paradigms About Plant Partnership	64
Biomedical Paradigm	65
Traditional Paradigm	73
Self-care Paradigm	78

Chapter 4 Start Your 5 Elements of Care® Self-care Plan	80
Starting a Self-care Plan	80
Chapter 5 Entering the Earth Element	83
Know Your Self – Anatomy, Physiology, and Patterns	83
The Chlorophyll Connection	85
Gentle Medicine Self-study #10 Entering the Green World	87
Gentle Medicine Begins at Home	90
Community Ethics and Cannabis, Tobacco, and American Ginseng	92
Becoming Ecocentric and Green	95
Protecting Your Self-care Green Pharmacy	97
Chapter 6 Awakening the Air Element	101
Mindful Decision-Making and Problem-Solving	102
Gentle Medicine Self-study #11 Breath and Body Scan	101
Nursing Process for Problem Solving in Self-care	105
Observations and Assessments	106
Pattern Recognition	108
Planning	108
Reframing Self-care Interventions... and Burnout	109
Evaluation	110
How to Decode Herbal Scientific Data	110
Referral Beyond Self-care	115
Chapter 7 Welcoming the Water Element	116
Recipes for Making Herbal Simples	118
Healing Foods and Oral Remedies	119
Teas – Infusions and Decoctions	120
Soups	122
Pills and Capsules	124
Syrups	125
Tinctures and Liquid Extracts	126
A Note About Homeopathy	128
Topical Applications	129
Compresses	130
Gentle Medicine Self-study #12 Comforting Ginger Compress	132
Poultices and Plasters	133
Infused Oils, Liniments, Salves, and Ointments	134
Simples for Creating A Healing Environment	137
Aromatherapy, Inhalations, and Steams	138
Herbal Baths	139
Five Element Foot Bath	140
Healing Gardens	142

Chapter 8 Fanning the Fire Element	146
Evaluating Best Self-care Practice	148
Guideline for Best Self-care Plans	152
Five Rights of Precision Plant Partnership Self-care	153
Right Plant	155
Weighing Benefits and Risks	155
Right Application	160
Gentle Medicine Self-Study #13 Home Garden Medicine	162
Common Sense and Complexity	162
Right Time	163
Interactions and Reactions	164
Right Dose	167
Right Person	170
Putting Fear into the Flame	171
Chapter 9 Effecting the Ether Element	174
Alchemy and the Secret Essence of Lemon Bread	176
Plant Alchemy	179
Formulation	181
Adaptogen Action and Thinking Plants	184
Bach Flower Remedies	186
Remember the Harmony of the Golden Ratio	188
Conclusion: The Way of the Thornless Rose for Nurses	190
Self-talk	191
Gentle Medicine Self-Study #14 Self-talk	191
Wisdom of Elders	192
Gentle Medicine Self-Study #15 Power Object	193
Learning from the Lemon Balm Lawn	195
Next Steps	198
Endnotes	199
References	205
Index	211
Experiential Guide	221

Forward by Catherine Dees

The plant kingdom was the original medicine cabinet, Nature's pharmacy, given to us by God or the gods. The world's sacred traditions speak of the blessings that plants are endowed with, as nourishment and medicine for the body, mind, and spirit. From deep antiquity – and still known to indigenous peoples – there has been a hallowed compact between humans and the plant kingdom. If we have distanced ourselves from that understanding, that sublime partnership, it's not the fault of the plants; they are here for us, as they have always been. It is up to us now to learn from them, engage all our senses, let them know we see and love and respect them. When we touch a plant, let it be with acknowledgment and gentleness and receptiveness – and a sincere desire to hear what it has to tell us. What we have to learn will be beyond price.

Martha Libster's Elements of Care® program, which is the focus of this extraordinary book, can be a life-changing experience. Be ready to encounter a deeper awareness of the body you inhabit and its profound energetic resonance in partnership with plants. Be ready for a shift in perceptions as you enter the beautiful world of "gentle medicine."

The healing effect of a conscious partnership with plants operates on levels far beyond what we think of as the physical; it extends to the emotional and spiritual. It is a pathway to "balance in body and peace of mind," as the book's title tells us. It is difficult to adequately describe the scope of this self-care program, except to say that a person who engages with it may never look at a plant or one's worldview, quite the same way.

Dr. Martha is a Clinical Nurse Specialist, a Nurse-Herbalist, and an Herbal Diplomat®. She is also a scholar of the long history of the healing arts and its practitioners. The Elements of Care® program represents thirty years of her integrative insights. Her life's work is the healing of the Self, in all its magnificent, majestic wholeness.

Throughout her book we find Gentle Medicine Self-Study lessons to guide us into an intimate conversation with the plants around us...to learn how to enter the Green World and become apprentices in a process of lifelong learning. And what a master class this is! Can food be medicine? Of course it can. Can what we call a weed be medicine? Of course it can. "...[E]very substance (including plants) has the potential to be medicine," Dr. Martha writes. The modern medical paradigm has moved away from these primary, traditional

avenues of self-care and self-healing, in its embrace of the dominant biomedical way of healthcare. Should it be a choice between one or the other? Not at all, she tells us. She is here to teach a new healing paradigm of inclusion, “a balance of biomedical, traditional, and personal plant partnership experience.”

So, how does this training work? It has to do with such concepts as mindfulness, sentience, common sense, intuition, insight. It’s about going into yourself and knowing that “partnering with plants requires full communion as an open two-way channel” – a tuning of the self “deliberately, consciously, and enthusiastically to plants.” We don’t “use” plants in this self-care paradigm, she says, we “apply” them.

And we keep the two-way channel open. “In essence, what and how we observe something, and what we think when we observe it, changes ‘it.’ If that sounds like Quantum Theory, it is, but it is also what is understood in indigenous cultures around the world. Your touch, your thought, your intention, affects your relationship with a plant. You could call that scientific, or spiritual, or simply mysterious. But Dr. Martha witnesses it every day of her life.

Self-care, as she sees it, is primary prevention. Her program of plant partnerships is “a foundation for a healthcare reform movement that seeks ... to ensure a more sustainable healthcare system for the future.”

Precision Self-care for Nurses is an important – I would say essential – book for these times. It is entirely possible that you will come away armed with new skills, new awareness of the plant consciousnesses all around you – and of the subtle vibrational ocean we and our plant partners swim in. Together.

This is a book of wisdom and peace – a glorious how-to on so many levels. It is as calming, hopeful, informative, surprising, enlightening, life-affirming and joyful as anything I have ever read. It brings forth the ancient truth of what “healing” is and should be, but often is not.

If you want to wrap your arms around a brilliant, beautifully written, “old-new” way to be fully alive to Nature’s healing ways – and expand yourself from the inside out – start here. And be sure to read about Dr. Martha’s multi-generational secret recipe for lemon bread, a creation that apparently lives in its own wondrous, alchemical reality.

Peace,

Catherine Dees
Co-Producer - Continuum: The Immortality Principle
Senior Editor - St. Lynn’s Press
Author - Omm Sety’s Egypt

Preface

Beating burnout is possible! This book will guide you step-by-step, element-by-element, to heal burnout. Better yet, this book holds the potential to prevent burnout from ever beginning in the first place. This book will not take any of your time having you read what the experts say about the problem of “burnout.” Burnout is a common term that refers to a state of perceived exhaustion of energy. In its most dire form, burnout presents as traumatic dissociation¹ in body, mind, emotion, and/or spirit. Instead of dwelling on the problem that many nurses today can identify very well, this book will focus right away on solutions to beating burnout that you can immediately adapt to your personal needs.

This book is about precision self-care for common health concerns, life transitions, and excessive stress that can lead to burnout. In the Elements of Care[®] gentle medicine program detailed throughout this book, you will follow the roots of ancient wisdom and healing traditions. You will learn a new language that can change your life with recipes and remedies for self-care practices leading to greater energy as balance in body and peace of mind. Your laboratory for personal growth resides in your own kitchen and garden!

This book seeks to add a new dimension to your current knowledge of health, healing, nursing, and self-care. Precision Self-care for Nurses takes an energetics-first approach to understanding health patterns that form the foundation for partnering with plants in the creation of a precision self-care plan. You will master the use of the five familiar Elements of Care[®] – ether, fire, air, water, and earth– while selecting and creating simple herbal remedies.

Drinking a cup of cool water or sipping a cup of tea, tasting a favorite childhood food, and singing a memorable song are just a few of the thousands of examples of simple remedies, acts of kindness, one can give to oneself in times of stress, sadness, confusion, pain, and thirst. Kindness is the remedy of remedies. Nurses have known this to be true for over 300 years.² Picking the precise remedy for use at the right time and place can be a catalyst for healing. A healing process always involves change. Plant medicines are gentle but powerful catalysts for change and therefore healing. Herbalism as partnership with plants in human healing has stood the test of time. Gentle medicines with plants as partners are often familiar and

accessible too. Simple, familiar, and accessible gentle medicines are the formula for beating burnout. Therefore, the Elements of Care® program for balance in body and peace of mind begins with re-entering the world of plants.

Martha Mathews Libster, PhD, MSN, APRN-PMHCNS, APHN-BC, FAAN
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

CHAPTER 1

Welcome Back to the Plant World

How beautiful everything is! Gardens, forests, mountains, deserts, and even the oceans and rivers are alive with the plant life that grows in, on, and around them. As you think about plants in Nature, try to recall any fragrances, colors, shapes, tastes, or textures associated with your experiences. The teachings in many cultures' healing traditions on the partnership between humans and plants suggest that it is this sensory experience that is key to understanding a plant's medicine. Some scientists suggest that the memories humans have from engaging with plants over millennia for the purpose of care and cure have become encoded impressions on human DNA. This might explain why plant medicines are so familiar and therefore perceived as safe. Plants, although quite powerful in their action, have earned the reputation throughout history as "gentle" medicine. Many, if not most plants, mainly when applied in the whole form following tradition, do, have extensive safety records. Regardless of the history, genetic memory, and an appearance of plant-like gentleness, safety with plants requires first-hand knowledge. A proper introduction is essential!

Establishing a relationship and being introduced to the personality of any healing plant is a foundation for safe and effective plant partnership. Getting to know the personality of a plant is similar to getting to know your patients. The more a nurse knows about the person who is the patient, the better they are at providing care that addresses the person's unique needs. Healthcare systems stress the importance of relationship-centered care because it is well documented that addressing individual patient needs increases the potential for safer and more effective care that does not over- or under-estimate any health benefits or risks of care. A more intimate understanding of a plant leads to a more informed, knowledgeable, and judicious partnership in care and comfort.

As communities become more industrialized, moving away from farming and their daily connection with the land as their source of food and medicine, people become less likely to remember their families' plant medicine traditions. Children are taught to buy a product at a store and may not know what is in that remedy or how it was made. They will not have had the experience of getting to know plants through gardening, tea tastings, plant walks in the forest, or preparing foods and simple medicines from

what they find in Nature or cultivate in their gardens. Reading about a plant or its medicinal constituents does not prepare one to choose from hundreds of plants on the planet as does direct interaction with Nature, be that in a garden, the woods, or growing a plant in a pot on a patio.

The best gentle plant medicines are those we know from experience. Those experiences are remembered and conveyed as stories of how the plant heals us. An understanding of plant medicine develops through learning growth patterns as well as observing through the senses, human physical and energetic responses when in the presence of any given plant. Is the medicine of a plant only within the plant? Those whose emphasis is on industry and patent medicine would say that the medicine of the plant lies only in its biochemical constituents. History and tradition say otherwise. The “medicine” of a plant lives in the stories shared of the enduring relationships between people and plants. There are many stories.

As you read this, do you remember any of your own stories of some plants that you have come to know? Each memory of plant medicine resides in the story as shared with others for whom we care. Safety, benefits, and risks are recorded in that story that can have more meaning in a moment of need than what is read in a book or online about another’s experience at a distance.

Many sources of information help us learn about the gentle medicine of plants and are referenced throughout this book. Still, ancient wisdom suggests that at the beginning, the safest and most beneficial route is plant introduction through personal sensory experience. This book provides you that opportunity for personal self-study of your relationship with the plant world, to begin to make your own medicine that will help you to beat burn-out and create stories of healing. Everyone’s stories of the plant world are welcome.

Interacting with healing plants is a highly sensory experience that has been known throughout history to inspire healing as balance in body and peace of mind. How are the plants able to inspire? By and through a relationship with plants, you will learn just how. Just as each person has a different personality, so too does each species of plant have different qualities which they demonstrate in the way they affect humans, such as how they smell, look, taste, and feel. If you do not remember having had an experience of plant partnership that inspires, this book, *Precision Self-care for Nurses*, offers you an opportunity of a lifetime! It guides you through the Elements of Care® (EOC) gentle medicine program to cultivate your connection with medicinal plants and design your Self-care plan for beating burnout. Start

with one plant as your focus for a relationship, perhaps one for which you have a memory from childhood. Try Gentle Medicine Self-study #1. For those who *do* have memories of plant partnerships, please consider this guide as an invitation and orientation to become an instructor in the EOC gentle medicine Self-care program with plants as partners.

—*Memories and Plant Partnership*—

Gentle Medicine Self-study #1: Plant Memories

What are your earliest memories of plants? How old were you?

What happened with the plant(s)?

What did you learn about the plant?

Use a journal to record your memories and reflections.

Relationships with plants often leave lasting impressions, mainly when they feed and heal us. Human experience with plants is stored away on DNA while imprinting a memory of the environment that is familiar and, therefore, safe. Safe memories of plants are communicated over generations through stories about beliefs, knowledge, and practices that hold meaning for peoples of every culture. Plant-people partnerships are universal. While the histories are vastly different from culture to culture, within the essence of those stories is the comfort that familiarity with plants as foods and medicines offers.

Have you ever thought about how plants affect your life? This program is a guide for deep reflection on your life experience of healing plants, flowers, and trees and for creating your unique Self-care plan for beating burnout. It is a guide for those who want to “stop and smell the roses” and mindfully enter the plant world in a new way. Many have forgotten their plant partnerships with flowers, trees, and plants. It is time to restore the knowledge of healing traditions with plants. Nurses need it. Our children need it.

For the past two centuries, people in industrialized nations have moved away from their direct connections with plants. This disconnection from plants is now having an impact on children. There are children in America who live in rural areas where agriculture is a way of life, who do not know

that broccoli is a vegetable and who cannot say from where the tomatoes on their pizzas come. I have taught them in my classes and had the awesome opportunity to introduce them to the plants that give them foods and medicines. Some children I have met are afraid to play outdoors in Nature and instead spend hours on their computers and cell phones so that they will not, as they have been told, develop allergies or illnesses due to environmental exposures. How has it happened that children are afraid of being in Nature and are subsequently losing direct connection with the plant world?³

My earliest memory of a plant partnership is of myself eating little clovers with tiny yellow flowers on the side of the road in front of our house in Massachusetts. I am not sure how I knew to eat them at age four, but they were delicately sour and satisfied my love of sour foods that I had as a child. I also loved to eat dill pickles and then drink the pickle juice in an aperitif glass! I have other early memories of plants. My mother taught me about collecting the sap running from maple trees and how to find and eat checkerberries in the mountains, but we are not sure how I knew about clovers and dill. Some children are born with a gift of math, music, or sports. Mine was the plants. My grandmother told me stories of her memories of my relationships with plants even before age four. She told me that I was in a restaurant for my third birthday, where I was asked by the server what I wanted for my birthday dinner. She told me that I put my little nose up in the air and said with a smile, "artichokes!" I remember my mother teaching me when and how to cook and eat an artichoke. She also taught me to drink milk after eating an artichoke because it makes the milk taste sweet. She said that was due to the iron in the artichoke.

I still eat artichokes, especially in the spring. The artichoke is the flower bud of *Cynara cardunculus*, a thistle plant cultivated as a food. I love the *process* of eating the green bud as much as the artichoke itself. I do not grow them, but I enjoy choosing them at the market. I pick the ones with the widest stems, which I have found often signifies a larger heart, the core of the artichoke. I also find peace in holding the artichoke in my hands, the process that happens when I connect the plant with the memory of my grandmother and mother's teachings. The taste, smell, and texture trigger positive memories and health as balance in my body.

Partnership with plants in Self-care and comfort of others is my life work. It is my calling to help those who desire a relationship with plants so that they, too, can learn the best ways to partner with healing plants in the care of self and humanity. If plants are your personal or professional inter-

est, an idea of fun, or even a passion, then you have found the right book! This book will guide you, step-by-step and element-by-element, to re-enter the world of medicinal plants in a way that you cannot get from surfing the internet. This is a whole program in one place. It also is the result of more than thirty years of experience in my work as a nurse.

My research on nurses' and the public's knowledge of healing plants demonstrates that plant partnership in Self-care is an enduring healing tradition. According to the last World Health Organization (WHO) study in the 1980s on the subject of traditional healing, 80 percent of the world's population still used their traditional methods of healing, including medicinal plants.⁴ Yet, that knowledge has become all but lost in more industrialized societies. The disconnect from the plant world, with their own medicine stories, has caused many to suffer, though they may not realize that to be one cause. Reconnection with the gentle medicine of the plant world requires no previous experience. This book, *Precision Self-care for Nurses*, is designed to serve as a guide on your journey - a reintroduction to Self-care with healing plants as partners. Welcome back to the plant world!

—***Plant Teachers***—

Plants provide a vessel for carrying out our hearts' intentions for healing, energy, and comfort in the care of Self and others. Plants are partners in this work and, therefore, also are "teachers" in this program. In the EOC program detailed in this book, you will learn what plants have taught me as a person and a nurse. I am their student, called time and again, to enter their green and flowery world. You, too, can engage plants to be your teachers! It is possible to have a personal relationship with a plant, even a single plant, that will bring you so much understanding of the beauty of the Creator and the creation—human, animal, and plant—that healing can occur at all levels of your being. People can heal spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically from experiences with a single plant. I have witnessed these many times. Some of those stories are included here. I hope that they make you smile.

I also hope that they help you to remember your connection with plants and how you think about and relate to them. How have you learned to care for yourself and others over the years? What do you believe and think about healing plants? Do you talk about plants when someone asks you how you

take care of yourself? You can now! To get started, think about your knowledge of plant foods. Take oranges, for example. Do you drink orange juice for cold or flu symptoms because you think that it is a “good source of vitamin C”? What beliefs or knowledge do you have about orange juice, whole oranges, or growing orange trees? Do you have other health beliefs about how to take care of yourself when you have a common cold or the flu? Do any of those beliefs include plants either as foods or medicine?

Gentle Medicine Self-study #2: When Does Food Become Medicine?

Pick or purchase a fresh orange (*Citrus sinensis*). Wash it thoroughly. Cut the orange into quarters. Set a timer for 5 minutes. Quiet yourself in a comfortable chair. Use all of your senses to focus mindfully on the orange. Smell, feel, look at, listen to, and taste the outer peel, the inner peel, and the fruit.

- What are the qualities of the orange?
- Is it “medicine”?
- When is a plant food and when is it medicine?
- Who decides? How is this decided?

Record your reflection.

By definition, a medicine is “a substance or preparation used in treating disease; something that affects well-being.”⁵ Therefore by definition, just about any substance on the planet could be a medicine if it is used to treat disease or it affects someone’s well-being in some way. Water, for example, is a substance for treating illness. Water is used to prepare medicines and wash the bodies of the sick. Drinking water also affects the well-being of a person. Without water, people cannot survive. Does this mean that water is medicine? It can indeed be used medicinally in the care and treatment of the ill. And some who have sampled the special mineral waters found in the western United States, for example, or at Lourdes in France, says that water itself can indeed be medicine. When does water become medicine and not just a fluid, we need to drink every day to survive?

A substance becomes a medicine when people decide to call it “medicine.” What is medicine varies from culture to culture. Water becomes medicine

at Lourdes in France because many people have witnessed that water heal the lame and the dying. This is an example of how an everyday substance can become medicine. As a healing substance, water becomes medicine because people assign healing properties to it. People believe the substance to be healing. Thus, every substance (including plants) has the potential to be medicine.

The age-old definition of a weed is “a plant for which no use has been discovered yet.” Because humans often do not value a plant until it has meaning for them, there are many plants deemed weeds! For example, St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), one of the most healing plants I know and one for which I have many fond memories, is deemed a “noxious weed” in numerous countries because it can be invasive. Invasive plant species are deemed as such because they are said to be a threat to the natural resources in an ecosystem or the human use of those resources. If the healing benefits of St. John’s Wort were well known and weighed against the risks, the plant might be exonerated.

There are five types of plant- human partnerships:

1. Weeds—no partnership
2. Ornaments—esthetic partnership
3. Foods—nourishing partnership
4. Medicine—care and cure partnership
5. Recreational and Abused substance—can lead to excessive partnership



St. John's Wort

Assigning the title of “medicine” to a plant may be one of the highest human honors bestowed on a plant. When a plant becomes “medicine,” it then becomes an object of power. Plants that can heal are valued in societies because they have the potential to heal and extend life. The plant is no longer an ornament, a pretty object growing outside the backdoor. It is no longer a food used to nourish the body alone; it can be a commodity and a resource that cures and heals. The plant becomes a source of revenue because of its healing properties. Countries that value plants as medicine have regulatory bodies whose job it is to determine safety standards for those plant medicines. Determining standards includes being able to decide on the nature of plant partnership.

Plants deemed a weed are either ignored or destroyed. Plant partners for

recreation and excessive use, such as opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*) and marijuana (*Cannabis sativa*), are often easily identified in society. They get a lot of attention through the media. The plants of these partnerships can be highly valued (and expensive) for their ability to create a particular effect on the body and mind, such as euphoria. Still, they can be plants of potential abuse when they are associated with addictive behavior or excessive recreational use. Plants used as ornaments and foods are identifiable as well. Ivy (*Hedera sp. L.*), for example, is a common ornamental house plant. It is not eaten as are raspberries (*Rubus idaeus L.*).

The ability to discern when a specific plant moves from a food to a medicine partnership is often more challenging, especially for the governmental regulatory bodies charged with protecting the public from harm due to plants. In reality, people frequently partner with many plants as both food and medicine, mainly when the term “medicine” implies more than substances that are ingested. Medicines are also applied topically and environmentally, meaning through the other senses of sight and smell. Examples of topical applications of plant medicines are salves and poultices. Environmental applications are baths and steams. Plant medicine applications will be discussed later on in greater detail.

A plant’s application does not determine its categorization as a food or medicine because plant medicines can be eaten or drunk just as plants are for food. How a plant looks or how much it costs cannot help determine whether it is a medicine or food either. The difference between a plant as food and plant as medicine lies in the *intent* of the person who is partnering with the plant. When a plant becomes a medicine, valued for its ability to heal, there is intention for care and cure.

Grape (*Vitis vinifera*) is one of many examples of a plant that is represented in all five areas of partnership. Grapes are just a weed to those who have the vines growing in their yard but cannot identify the plant as grape. Red, purple, and green grapes are eaten as fruit. The leaves also are included in Greek and Middle Eastern cuisines. Grapes also are medicine. They have anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving properties ascribed to constituents such as ferulic acid, salicylic acid, ascorbic acid, and quercetin. Traditionally grapes, fresh or dried (raisins), are known to relieve discomfort related to arthritis and migraine. Wine is also produced from grapes, which has a number of medicinal benefits. Wine was historically prescribed and administered by nurses⁶ as a remedy often referred to as *Spiritus fermentae*. Grapes, as wine, also can be drunk excessively. Wine is another example of a plant partnership in

which the intention is food and medicine as it can be drunk as medicine in the same way it is drunk as part of a meal. The difference is in the person's purpose or intent.

—*Self-care in a Tiered Healthcare System*—

The human intent to heal with plants has been traced back to the earliest days of our species' evolution. The remains of medicinal plants, the pollen grains of eight plants including *Ephedra sp.* are said to have been discovered in the burial site of a Neanderthal man. Before the creation of antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals, plant medicines were what nurses, physicians, and other healers all used in healing practice. Plant partnership is not new to the world of science and technology. It is not a passing fad within the domain of alternative or complementary medicine.

History clearly shows the influence plants have had in the development of healing practices of the public and professional health care providers, drug development, and sustainability of health care systems of nations over the centuries. People partner with plants in Self-care and comfort of others because the plants are accessible, inexpensive, empowering, and effective remedies. People make their own whole-plant remedies, such as juices, extracts, compresses, poultices, teas, syrups, soups, plasters, steams, and baths. Plants not only play an important role in healing. They provide us with food, spiritual inspiration, and oxygen and therefore are intrinsic to life itself. They are a source of energy for a life that cannot and will not become burned out. Plants are essential partners in the design of a Self-care practice that supports and nurtures an energized, vibrant life.

A four-step tiered system⁷ of healthcare exists within communities that starts with Self-care as the first tier. When changes occur in health, prompting a person to seek greater balance in body and peace of mind, their first step is searching their memory for how to deal with the change. If the change and the remedy to support balance are familiar, (i.e. they are present in one's memory), then there can be peace of mind in the knowledge that they can take care of themselves. A person practicing Self-care can restore or promote their own health by making lifestyle and dietary changes and by making Self-care simple medicines from the elements found in Nature in the form of fire or warmth, water, and plants. Terms often used

to refer to this first step are “conservative care” or “watchful waiting.”⁸ Another term, “self-limited disease”⁹ has been used since the 19th century by nurses and physicians who suggested that to avoid over-treatment, it was often preferable to first observe and support patients as they practice their own Self-care and let “Nature” run its course rather than suggest immediate biomedical intervention. Florence Nightingale wrote in her advice book *Notes on Nursing* in 1859 that: “Nature alone cures . . . and what nursing has to do in either case, is to put the patient in the best condition for Nature to act upon him.”¹⁰ She echoed popular sentiment among community caregivers and the public alike at a time in which people recognized the value of watchful waiting in the case of self-limited diseases as a judicious response to moderating perceptions of over-treatment by physicians using “heroic therapies,” such as bloodletting and elemental mercury called “calomel.”¹¹ However, self-limited disease and watchful waiting do not suggest that people should be doing nothing. The first tier is a vital time for Self-care, managing one’s environment within and without. This tier is the focus of this EOC program.

It is also essential to understand the position of the other three tiers involved in health decision making. When a person or their family’s resources, Self-care with lifestyle, food, and home medicines do not meet their health needs for care and cure, they begin the search for assistance outside of the home. The second tier is seeking the advice of family, friends, along with books and websites. The web has become an excellent rapid source of health information that is not without its risks. The third tier is seeking help from knowledgeable caregivers in the community, such as a nurse for their support, experience, and knowledge. The purpose of engaging the community caregiver in the third tier is to help navigate health choices, weigh the benefits and risks of those choices, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of chosen remedies, and then create and manage decision points for knowing when and if ever to move to the fourth tier. The fourth tier is biomedical care, that includes pharmaceutical drugs, surgery, radiation, and other diagnostics and treatments that require specialized knowledge.

Gentle medicine with conservative, watchful, and active Self-care is a foundational part of any healthcare system that promotes people’s faith in their ability to take care of themselves and their families. Some do not know the history of medicine and the value and purpose of Self-care as the first tier. Some have entirely abandoned the possibility of a tiered health system and,

with it all responsibility for their health. They may rely solely on fourth-tier biomedical care in all situations at all times. Relying exclusively on biomedical care is not judicious, nor is it feasible or sustainable for any community or nation.

Nurses witness the satisfaction of people, young and old, who have set an intention to learn how to care for themselves whenever possible. When I ask people if they would prefer to be *asked* what they would like to do about their health or *told* what to do about their health, most people want to be asked rather than told. People know that they are responsible for their health – body, mind, emotion, and spirit. Each person is responsible for the health choices that they make. Yet, there are times when people do want and need someone to tell them what to do. Typically, this is when they are in the most urgent or emergent of situations when they need compassion and access to a more considerable body of knowledge of healthcare.

Gentle Medicine Self-study #3: Self-care Survey Question

Would you rather be asked what you would like to do about your health or told what to do about your health? Ask this question of yourself or a friend or family member you are helping. The answer serves as an indicator for the tier of care that may be required.

Note to Reader: Please consult a reputable resource for triaging the advisability of engaging in Self-care. The Elements of Care® Self-care program is a resource for best designs in Self-care when the first tier of care is warranted. Recommended resources for triage: Fries, J. & Vickery, D. Take care of yourself and Fries, J. & Vickery, D. Take care of your child.

Memories of gentle medicine plant partnerships endure. While peoples' intent to heal with plants may not have changed over time, how people partner with medicinal plants in Self-care has undergone many changes. Technology has had a significant impact on development of herbal supplements and pharmaceuticals. As you proceed through the EOC program and do the Self Studies in the chapters that follow, you will learn some critical strategies for making informed choices about gentle medicines, most specif-

ically about a partnership with plants in precision Self-care. These strategies draw from many sources from the biomedical to the traditional worldviews or paradigms. You will also learn the health beliefs, culture, and language associated with these paradigms so that you, too, can teach others about plant partnerships in precision Self-care from a highly informed perspective that includes a balance of biomedical, traditional, and personal plant partnership experience. The beliefs, perceptions, and practices associated with plant partnerships exhibited by the three distinct plant perspectives will be discussed in more detail as you read on.

The significant social changes of the 1800s in the United States when being self-reliant and “being one’s own doctor” as the first step in health care was a deeply held spiritual value and publicly pronounced ethic¹² has been replaced by technology including pharmaceutical drugs. That climate is changing. The invention of the electric light, modern plumbing, and water filtration plants have altered the course of human history and improved public health in so many ways. Unfortunately, people are realizing once again that rapid industrialization and the overall shift away from connections with Earth, plants, and seasonal growth cycles has taken its toll. The current biomedical healthcare culture that equates a preeminent healthcare system with primary care (1:1 provider treatment), technological innovations including pharmaceuticals, and hospital treatment has led to the creation of the most expensive system of medicine. While the biomedical culture and system often dominate public conversation, Self-care culture is still prevalent in society. It has been called the *hidden healthcare system*.¹³ In the EOC program, I suggest that you consider all paradigms.

Re-entering the plant world and beginning to think in terms of the first tier of Self-care, does not oppose the biomedical. It does help to put the biomedical in perspective, however. The knowledge, ability, and freedom to take care of Self in body, mind, emotion, and spirit is one of the greatest gifts we have and can offer to ourselves, our children, and our patients. Self-care is a gift that “keeps on giving.” The EOC program outlined in the next chapters demonstrates the essential role plant partnerships have in precision Self-care that would promote greater balance in body and peace of mind.